

Iowa Preschool Program

February 14, 2011

With limited state dollars, it makes sense to invest in children who will benefit the most from high-quality preschool. The new Iowa Preschool Program helps families who need a hand with the cost, while more affluent families pay full tuition. This sort of sustainable approach is critical to help us manage the state budget in future years and guarantee Iowa's youngest children a bright future.

- The new Iowa Preschool Program helps eligible 4-year-olds attend high-quality private and public preschools starting fall 2011.
- Research shows investing in high quality preschool pays off for economically disadvantaged children by raising academic achievement. It also reduces the need for repeating a grade and for special education services. It may lessen later involvement in the criminal justice system.
- High-quality preschool, however, is beneficial for all children.
- The \$3,000 Iowa Preschool Scholarship for each eligible 4-year-old helps pay for a minimum 10 hours of preschool a week for 34 weeks annually starting fall 2011.
- The state spends \$43.6 million, plus parent contributions raise several million dollars more.
- All families of eligible 4-year-olds contribute to tuition with sliding scale fees based on federal poverty guidelines up to 300 percent of poverty.
- Quality is high. Participating private and public programs must meet strong state preschool child learning standards – the same standards in place now. These are either Head Start Performance Standards, National Association of Education of Young Children Standards and Criteria, or Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards.
- A common, comprehensive statewide assessment will measure performance of 4-year-old Iowa Preschool Scholarship recipients and as many other 4-year-olds in preschool as possible. It will guide sound instructional decisions and show whether preschool programs are successful.
- A certified teacher will no longer be required.
- An individual with a bachelor's degree may teach preschool in a participating program while working toward a new early childhood certificate that must be earned in two years. This is an ongoing option.
- There is another path to becoming a preschool teacher in the short term. An individual with an associate of arts degree may teach while working toward earning the new early childhood certificate and a bachelor's degree in the next three years. This is a phase-in period to allow more programs to meet state standards.
- Parents choose which private or public preschool they want their child to attend, provided space is available. The money follows the child.

- An Iowa Department of Education website lets parents enter a Zip code to find participating programs near home or work. Their choice does not have to be in their school district.
- School districts register 4-year-olds eligible for Iowa Preschool Scholarships for the private or public preschool their parents choose, collecting proof of income and sending state funding to private programs. This is the case whether or not the district operates its own preschool. Up to 5 percent of state dollars flowing through districts may be used for school district administration.
- Private preschools collect the fees parents pay for children receiving Iowa Preschool Scholarships who attend their programs. Public preschools do the same thing. Both may use tuition for salaries and other instructional costs, of course, but also for transportation.
- School districts must document that they have contacted all potential private preschools that may wish to enroll Iowa Preschool Scholarship recipients.
- Early Childhood Iowa receives an annual report from the Iowa Department of Education on Preschool Scholarships and advises the department on promoting collaboration with other programs and services.
- Early Childhood Iowa is a key partner with public and private preschools and the state in promoting the Iowa Preschool Scholarships in communities.
- Early Childhood Iowa strengthens preschool program quality in cooperation with the Iowa Department of Education and Area Education Agencies.
- One parents may use pre-tax dollars to pay for preschool.
- Part of the state appropriation pays for three education department positions, the new statewide assessment and a website promoting Iowa Preschool Scholarships and the importance of preschool in general.